

HANTAVIRUS PULMONARY SYNDROME

General Precautions

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) was first recognized in 1993 in the Four Corners Area of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. Since then, it has been found in over half of the states in the United States. HPS is fairly uncommon and the chances of becoming infected are low (less than 200 confirmed cases). However, the outcome of HPS infections is very serious with almost half of all cases (approximately 45%) resulting in death.

What is the source of HPS?

The deer mouse is the primary carrier of the virus. This rodent is found throughout the United States, except in the Southeast and East Coast. In the Southeast, the cotton rat is known to carry hantavirus. In the East Coast, the rice rat and the white-footed mouse carry hantavirus.

How is the virus spread?

Hantavirus is spread from wild rodents to people. The virus gets in the air as mist from urine and saliva or dust from feces. Breathing in the virus is the most common way of becoming infected although you can also become infected by touching the mouth or nose after handling contaminated materials. A rodent's bite potentially can also spread the virus.

What are the symptoms of HPS?

Symptoms of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome usually appear within 2 weeks of infection but can appear as early as 3 days to as late as 6 weeks after infection. First symptoms are general and flu-like: fever (101-104 F); headache; abdominal, joint, and lower back pain; sometimes nausea and vomiting. However, the primary symptom of this disease is difficulty in breathing, which is caused by fluid build-up in the lungs and quickly progresses to an inability to breathe. If any combination of the symptoms described above especially difficulty in breathing appear after direct or indirect exposure to rodents, contact your doctor or public health clinic immediately and be sure to mention your exposure to rodents.

To minimize the risk for hantavirus infection, follow these precautions:

Controlling Mice Outside:

- Locate woodpiles, and garbage cans at least 100 feet from house.
- Cover garbage cans with tight-fitting lids.
- Eliminate food sources.
- Store all animal feed in containers with lids.
- Discard excess pet food in the evening.

- Take up pet water bowls in the evening.
- Clear brush and grass from around foundation.
- Seal exterior holes and cracks 1/4 inch or larger in size.

Controlling Mice Inside:

- Wash dishes and clean the floor and counters.
- Put pet food and water away at night.
- Store food/garbage in containers with tight lids.
- Seal interior holes and cracks 1/4 inch or larger in size.

Use safety Precautions:

- Wear rubber gloves.
- Don't stir up and breath dust.
- Wet contaminated areas, rodent carcasses and nest materials with disinfectant.
- Dispose of dead animals properly.
- Disinfect used gloves.

REFERENCES

Health Information, National Center for
Infectious Diseases, Centers for
Disease Control and Prevention,
Department of Health and Human
Services

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**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Public Health Program
1849 "C" St., NW (Room 7427)
Washington, D.C. 20240
202-565-1120
Fax 202-565-1115**

If you have any questions, please
contact your Regional Public Health
Consultant or park sanitarian, or call
WASO Public Health for more
information at **202-565-1120** or see our
NPS Public Health web page at
www.nps.gov/public_health/.

